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Government
Publications

CANADA AND THE WAR

*The Military Occupation of French North Africa
and
The Withdrawal of Recognition of the
Government at Vichy*

Statements by

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Prime Minister of Canada

OTTAWA, NOVEMBER 8 and 9, 1942



The Military Occupation of French North Africa

NOVEMBER 8, 1942

The policy of maintaining diplomatic relations with the Vichy Government will now be fully understood in Canada. The same will be true in the United States of its relations with Vichy. It is no secret that the British Government, not having diplomatic relations of its own with Vichy, attached no less importance than our government to the maintenance of Canada's relations with Vichy which have proved of value to the Allied cause in many ways. It will be clear from the statement issued to-day by Mr. Cordell Hull that in this matter, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom have been following a concerted policy with common objectives. As Mr. Hull has indicated, this policy has been directed towards ultimately liberating France from her German captors.

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Beginning of the Liberation of France

The purposes of maintaining relations with Vichy enumerated by Mr. Hull include the opportunity which they gave to the United States to maintain close relations with the French people, to keep alive the basic concept of freedom of the French people, to retain close touch with all phases of French and German relations under the armistice, to secure highly important information, and, most important, to pave the way and prepare the background for the planning and sending of a military expedition into the western Mediterranean.

The military operations which began early this morning in North Africa were officially described by President Roosevelt as the beginning of the war to liberate France. In spirit, France has always been of the company of the United Nations. From the day French military resistance collapsed, her allies have never ceased to hope, to pray, to plan, and to work for her liberation and restoration. The war of liberation to-day entered the stage of active offensive combat.

In no country has the agony of France been more deeply felt than in Canada. Canada's attitude to the French people in their suffering was eloquently expressed by my late colleague, the Right Hon. Ernest Lapointe, in a broadcast to France. Mr. Lapointe said, "Over there, you are our allies because we know too well the heart of France to doubt an instant of her heart's loyalty." The ties of kinship bind France more closely to Canada than to any other of the United Nations. We have, therefore, in this critical hour, a special duty to do all in our power to make known to the French people the true attitude and real purpose of the operations which have now been undertaken.

Every Canadian, I am sure, was gratified to know that no time had been lost. In the early hours of this morning, the voice of Canada was already being broadcast to the people of France. In the weeks to come every Canadian will have a duty by word and deed to be worthy of this great trust. No other people can do more than we can to assure the French people of our sympathy and our understanding.

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The Attitude of the French People

Our faith in the integrity of purpose of the French people has been sustained by the thousands of Fighting French who have never ceased to fight on at our side.

It will, however, be important to guard against misunderstanding of the conduct of some Frenchmen. We cannot be sure that the forces of the United Nations will meet with no resistance from French forces. But, in no circumstances, can that mean that we are at war against the real France. Whatever resistance there is will in reality be German resistance. The French leaders who appear at its head will be the tools or puppets of Germans in the background. Habits of obedience coupled with a misunderstanding of the true situation may be sufficient to take some Frenchmen into battle against the forces of freedom. Their courage may even lead to sharp and painful encounters. But we can rest assured that their hearts will not be in the fight.

We know enough about conditions within France to know how impatiently the mass of the French people await the hour of liberation. We know, too, from the hundreds of Canadians and Englishmen, who have escaped from France, that thousands of people daily risk their lives to help them. It is our mission to remove all doubt from the minds of the French people that we are no less eager to help them and to help them soon to win back the liberty which has never seemed so precious as since it was lost.

The Voice of the Enemy and the Voice of France

Since the armistice of 1940, the radio and press of Vichy has been controlled by Nazi Germany. We may, therefore, expect a deluge of Nazi propaganda from the Vichy radio. It will be much of it in the French language directed to the French-speaking people of Canada and elsewhere on this continent. It will be subtle. The accents will be French, but the message will be German.

No one should be confused or deceived by its purpose. Its every word is calculated to further the cause of the enemy. It can only help him if we listen to its message. Rather should we keep our ears attuned to the authentic voice of France—the France of liberty and of humanity.

***The Withdrawal of Recognition of the Government
at Vichy***

Statement by the Prime Minister

NOVEMBER 9, 1942

The fact that the men who have been in nominal control of the Government of France have ordered the armed forces of France to offer resistance to military forces of the United Nations sent to assist in the liberation of France from Nazi domination, makes it perfectly clear that there no longer exists in France a government that has any effective independent existence—in other words, that there no longer exists in France a legal or constitutional government in any sense representative of the French people, but only a German puppet government.

In these circumstances the Canadian Government has ceased to recognize the present Government at Vichy as being the de jure Government of France and diplomatic relations with Vichy are accordingly terminated.

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